

HISTORY OF UNITED FARM WOMEN



Compiled by Mrs. R. W. Barritt

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PAST OFFICERS OF ASSOCIATION

PRESIDENTS

Miss Reed
Hon. Irene Parlbry
Mrs. M. M. Sears

Mrs. R. B. Gunn
Mrs. Amy Warr
Mrs. R. Price

VICE-PRESIDENTS

Mrs. Cecil Rice Jones
Mrs. H. E. Spencer
Mrs. J. E. Ross
Mrs. K. Maguire
Mrs. R. B. Gunn
Mrs. O. S. Welch
Mrs. B. F. Kiser

Mrs. F. E. Wyman
Mrs. J. W. Field
Mrs. R. Price
Mrs. P. C. Hepburn
Mrs. Winifred Ross
Mrs. Marie E. Malloy

SECRETARIES

Mrs. R. W. Barritt
Miss M. W. Spiller
Miss Anna Archibald
Miss J. B. Kidd
Miss Lucille Macrae

Miss Edna Hull
Miss F. Bateman
Miss F. Alice Hughes
Miss E. Birch

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It was a woman, Marie Corelli, who once wrote, "It is only when work is the outcome of a great love and sympathy for others that it lasts and keeps its influence." Such a work is based on personal sacrifice so gladly rendered that it ceases to be a sacrifice, and becomes instead voluntary, satisfying service. Such service forms the background of the farm people's movement, both of the men and women, in the three prairie provinces; and by self-denying service the Movement is still upheld.

The class-conscious Farm Women's Organization had its origin in Saskatchewan. As that of Alberta developed in exactly the same manner in its early stages, it may not be out of place to outline the steps taken in the former province.

A happy inspiration on the part of the Secretary of the Grain Growers' Association brought about a successful convention of farm women in Saskatchewan in February, 1913, in connection with the Grain Growers' annual convention. Over fifty women registered, but many more were in attendance. It is worthy of note that Miss Frances Beynon of the Grain Growers Guide presided at that first convention, as she was later to do in Alberta, and the meetings were held in Saskatchewan University. The women's congress expressed by resolution, its approval of holding future conventions of like nature, and of organizing a Women Grain Growers' Association. A resolution was also passed that the Grain Growers be asked to pass by-laws allowing the women to have their own local executive and charge of their own local funds. A committee of women was appointed to carry on the work through the ensuing year, and the Constitution of the Association having been amended meantime to allow the formation of a Woman's Auxiliary and giving women full standing in the Association, they proceeded at the 1914 Convention to organize provincially. Mrs. McNaughton, recently honored by Premier Bennett for the part she played in this unique movement and her work generally for farm women, was the first provincial president, and Miss Erma Stocking the first provincial secretary. These names are recorded here because of the unselfish aid they rendered in the early days of the Alberta organization.

Now to get a complete historical perspective for Alberta, it will be necessary to sketch the events which led to the formation of Local No. 1 at Alix, not only because the first two provincial presidents and the first provincial secretary were drawn from this Local, but also because it was the laboratory where the initial problems confronting locals were worked out. The time is the spring of the memorable year 1914, and the scene is a gathering of women in the little parish room of the Anglican Church at Alix. For some days previously, telephones had been busy announcing to the women of the vicinity that a speaker, touring the west, then a guest of Miss Reed - of whom we shall hear a little more later - would address them on the subject of country women's organizations,

with particular reference to the Homemakers of Saskatchewan whose activities she had recently been investigating. On coming to Alberta she found that a somewhat similar organization, of which little was then known, existed in the Province under the name of the Women's Institute.

She had an interested audience, and the women after some discussion, decided to meet again, and in the meantime would consider the advisability of forming themselves into some such organization. The second gathering was a huge one, and the upshot of the matter was that the women decided to make their gatherings a permanent affair. Thus the Alix Country Woman's Club came into being, with the writer of this history as president and Mrs. Irene Parlbay as secretary, - not a very spectacular beginning for the romantic sequel.

Since 1913, when the U.F.A. constitution was amended to admit women on equal terms with men, there had been women members of the U.F.A. And now occurred a little incident which was destined to be fraught with consequences. In 1914 the U.F.A. Secretary, Mr. Woodbridge, invited farm women - whether members of the U.F.A., Institute or unorganized - to meet in Edmonton at the time of the annual convention for the purpose of considering the question of a provincial organization on the same lines as the Women Grain Growers of Saskatchewan. The Alix Club named as delegates to that gathering its president and secretary, with Miss Reed, the vice-president, as the secretary's alternate. At the last moment, Mrs. Parlbay was taken ill and Miss Reed and the writer proceeded to Edmonton.

The provincial gathering held in McDougall Church, and consisting of 58 Alberta women without any pre-arranged program, had many features pleasant to recall - among them addresses by Mrs. McClung, Dr. Alexander, Miss Beynon, already mentioned, and Miss Clendenan, another keen press woman. When the question of organization arose, there was a sharp divergence of opinion. Some of the delegates were anxious that we should throw in our lot with the Women's Institute, while others wished to remain under the aegis of the U.F.A. Suffice it to say that the latter were in the majority. Those who were not eligible for membership withdrew, to associate themselves with the sister organization which later in the same year also organized provincially. The archives of the time carry this item: "Mr. Rice Sheppard on behalf of the committee appointed to meet with the delegates of the Women's Convention reported that the ladies had decided to adopt the Constitution of the U.F.A. and to elect provincial officers provisionally, pending such alterations as made their organization legal. Mr. Sheppard moved, Mr. Trego seconded, that a grant of One Hundred Dollars be given by this Association to the newly formed Women's Auxiliary for the furtherance of the work of that Organization. Carried unanimously."

It may be of interest to know that the first set of provincial officers were the following: President, Miss Reed, Alix; Vice-President, Mrs. Cecil Rice-Jones, Veteran; Secretary-Treasurer, Mrs. R. W. Barritt, Mirror; Directors, Mrs. H. C. McDaniel, Whitla, Mrs. J. A. Davis, Sr., Acme and Mrs. O. S. Young, Lacombe.

The doubts and fears, the labor and sacrifice of that first and most difficult year in the history of the United Farm Women would furnish material for an interesting chapter in any story of Western Progress. Not only were we confronted with the necessity of building a provincial organization from the ground up on very slender finances, but we found ourselves with a tremendous amount of relief work on our hands as well, due to successive crop failures in the southern part of the province. At times the home of the secretary looked like nothing so much as a warehouse. However, at the close of the year we had our relief work on a scientific basis, had twenty-three locals of farm women - some of which had existed previously as community clubs under various names - with

a membership of over seven hundred, to our credit, had evolved a literature of our own, and were not in debt. The financial statement of that year's operations on general account is as follows:

By grant from U.F.A.	\$100.00
By cheque from Mr. Rice Sheppard	61.70
Total Receipts	161.70
Total Disbursements	113.45
Balance	48.25

The president had paid her organization expenses out of her own pocket, and the secretary had worked without office equipment and without salary.

Just here the writer desires to pay a tribute to the Department of Extension of the University. Mr. Ottewell, its head, and Miss Montgomery, librarian, were most enthusiastic over this Alberta infant. Without their co-operation we should have been at a great loss for program material; and the same Department is our invaluable ally today. The University Travelling Library became an early feature of our work.

And now Mrs. Parlbj enters the provincial picture. Her first contribution was a paper read at the 1916 convention. She was elected president that year, and the Women's Auxiliary became the United Farm Women of Alberta. Mrs. Spencer, who also came before the convention for the first time, was elected vice-president. Of the retiring president, Miss Reed, one woman expressed the feelings of many when she said: "I can never thank her half enough for shaking me out of my indifference and self-complacency."

The first organization tour undertaken by Mrs. Parlbj and the writer - in June, 1916 - reads like a page from the geography of Alberta. It included Calgary, Blackie, High River, Cayley, Nanton, Macleod, Craigmyle, Delia and Stettler; and in both its pleasant and unpleasant features it was a foretaste of the contribution to be rendered by provincial officers.

In 1916 the first committees were formed as follows: Health, Mrs. Parlbj, Convener; Education, Mrs. Barritt; Young People's Work, Mrs. Spencer. And now began, as far as the U.F.W.A. was concerned, the investigations which culminated in Municipal Hospitals, Public Health Nurses, Revision of the Course of Study and agitation for a more up-to-date system of Rural Education, and the formation of the Junior U.F.A.

From the outset, our women interested themselves in existing legislation, and eventually another committee was formed to look into our laws, particularly as they affected the property and civil rights of married women. The work of this committee under its various conveners would require a pamphlet of its own. Suffice to say here, that as a result of its demands, backed by that of various other women's organizations, juster and more protective legislation has been placed on the statute books. The field of study has gradually extended until now we are more concerned with the new garment than putting patches on the old. In other words, we visualize a new social order where the impossible contradictions and ghastly injustices of the present shall have no place.

At the 1917 convention, a resolution was passed asking for the establishment of Municipal Hospitals. As the result of a great deal of correspondence on the part of the Health Convener, Mrs. Parlbay, there were brought together Mr. Greenfield who as president of the Rural Municipalities Association had pioneered in rural medical research work, Mr. Lamb, later Deputy Minister of Health, Mr. H. W. Wood, Mr. Rice Sheppard, Mrs. Parlbay and the writer. At this conference, held in the parlor of the King Edward Hotel, Edmonton, the first Municipal Hospitals Bill was drafted. The present Act was assented to on April 17th, 1919. In January, 1920, the Social Service Convener, Mrs. Hart, was able to report that over a hundred Municipal Hospitals were then in the course of organization, and some in operation.

At the convention in 1918, the U.F.W.A. endorsed the resolution of the Calgary Board of Trade asking for a Department of Public Health, and in the same year not only was this Department established, but a system of Public Health Nurses, for which the Health Convener had long contended, was also inaugurated. Then for a brief period we had free medical inspection of school children and consultations held with the mothers in the home by the Public Health Nurse.

To carry the history of provincial health work a few steps further. In the summer of 1924, the initial plans were taken in connection with the work of the Travelling Clinic, which performed tonsil and adenoid operations, the first one being held under the District Nurse stationed at Halcourt. In October, 1924, the first Dental Clinic was held at Kinuso and Slave Lake. These clinics are still carrying on their valuable work, and much credit must be given to the Minister of Health, Mr. Hoadley, for the success of the experiment.

At the 1917 convention, the report of the Convener of Education, who happened to be the writer, contained among other matters a resolution asking the Minister to call together representative persons, both professional and lay, to consider the whole question of rural education, with a view to re-organization of the system. The following year concrete suggestions were made by her for a revised Course of Study, and there were passed by both conventions in most interesting sessions.

In October, 1918, the writer, representing the U.F.W.A., and Miss Archibald, the U.F.A., were sent as delegates to a Dominion-wide conference called at Winnipeg. From that conference emerged the National Council of Education; and through the efforts of the Alberta delegates, Mr. H. W. Wood became a member of the Council as a representative of the rural people.

In March, 1921, a committee meeting was called by the Minister of Education to consider the revision of the Elementary school curriculum and later one for the revision of the High School Course, at both of which the then Convener, Mrs. Gunn, was present. Many of the suggestions advanced in 1918 are now incorporated in the Course of Study, while the agitation for the larger unit of administration carried on almost continuously ever since, found expression in the Baker Bill. Meantime, the U.F.W.A. committee, under the convenership of Mrs. Winifred Ross is continuing to keep abreast of the most advanced thought of the day in educational matters, and under a happier economic system its labours will bear fruit.

The Young People's Movement passed through various preliminary stages before it found its wings as the Junior U.F.A. From the outset the U.F.W.A. encouraged the formation of young people's debating, athletic and dramatic societies in connection with the locals. School Fairs were organized with the

help of the Department of Agriculture, where competitions in gymnastics, art, chorus and solo work as well as agricultural exhibits took place. The first provincial conferences sponsored were those of Boys and Girls Clubs held under the auspices of Church Bodies. Then in 1918 the University Women's Club held a very successful Girl's Conference at the University of Alberta.

Meantime, the convener of Young People's Work was seeking some sort of provincial organization on an economic basis. At the annual convention of 1919 the Junior U.F.A. took definite shape under the convenership of Mrs. Gunn, and today it has a recognized place in the Movement with its own officers and its own program. A most interesting and helpful feature is the Farm Young People's Week held annually at the University of Alberta since its inception in 1919, and sponsored by the parent organization.

The aspirations of the Farm Movement of the three prairie provinces found common expression through the Canadian Council of Agriculture. In 1918, however, a resolution was passed by the U.F.W.A. looking to closer correlation of the Farm Women's Movement of the West through an Interprovincial Council. In September, 1919, the U.F.W.A. president, Mrs. Parlbay, was one of the two Alberta women called into consultation by the Federal Government on the question of Immigration for women, and Mrs. McNaughton, president of the new Interprovincial Council, was chosen to represent organized western farm women on the Council then formed. Earlier, Mrs. Parlbay became one of the Board of Governors of the University, and our Movement has had representation on that body ever since. In 1919 also, the writer was appointed a member of the Social Service Council of Alberta and for some years contributed articles to their national magazine by the request of the editors. Thus our Movement was attaining recognition both provincially and nationally. In 1920, when Mrs. Parlbay resigned, there were 293 Locals of the U.F.W.A. with a membership of 3,926 and a Junior membership of 942. The number of vice-presidents had been increased to two, one for the northern part of the province and one for the south. The president of the U.F.W.A. was an ex-officio member of the U.F.A. Executive, while the vice-presidents were ex-officio members of the Board of Directors, this to a large extent unifying the work of the whole Movement.

Mrs. Parlbay was succeeded by Mrs. Sears of Nanton, who remained in office for the succeeding four years. Her term was marked by the political action taken in 1921, which resulted in the capture of the provincial government, and the return of the U.F.A. federal members who have made such an outstanding contribution to the political life of Canada. At that time, the membership of the whole organization reached its peak, there being 309 U.F.W.A. locals and a membership of 4,536.

Mrs. Sears was particularly interested in Hygiene, and the agitation then begun for Birth Control Information and Sterilization of the mentally unfit has since borne fruit in a demand for clinics where contraceptive information may be obtained, and in the Sterilization Act. In regard to the latter, the work of Mrs. J. W. Field, a vice-president, and health convener must be particularly noted, as also her unceasing efforts for Travelling Clinics, a psychopathic ward in the Mental Hospital and Health Units.

Mrs. R. B. Gunn, whose name has already been mentioned in connection with Young People's Work and Education, followed Mrs. Sears. She succeeded Mrs. Parlbay on the Board of Governors of the University. During her term of office, the Travelling Clinics became an important feature of public health work. In 1925, the Egg and Poultry Pool was launched. Mrs. Gunn represented the Canadian Council of Agriculture at the Pan-American Congress of Women held at Washington, and during her term of office represented the U.F.W.A. at many important gatherings.

The first depression president was Mrs. Amy Warr, a keen student of economics; and during her term of office two new committees - political economy, formed at the request of the Peace River Women's Conference, and Beautification and Horticulture - were added to the list. But perhaps the outstanding event was the launching of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, when on August 1st, 1932, Farmer-Labor-Socialist representatives met in Calgary and formulated a Manifesto, looking toward the establishment of a Co-operative Commonwealth. This Manifesto, having been approved by the U.F.A. and U.F.W.A. in annual convention, representatives of these organizations met with delegates from other provinces in Regina the following year where a national program was drawn up. Thus a further step was taken in the evolution of the Farm Movement, its significance lying in the fact that while preserving its own economic identity, its viewpoint had sufficiently broadened to enable it to enthusiastically co-operate with other groups having the same social philosophy.

Constituency Conferences of U.F.W.A. have been attempted in recent years and are proving most effective. A larger number of women are reached than through the annual convention alone, and a fellowship established which is impossible in the busy provincial gathering. Another achievement has been the institution of the Farm Women's Rest Week at Olds, first proposed by a farm woman, Mrs. Townsend of Erskine.

In 1933, Mrs. Warr resigned, and Mrs. Price, first vice-president, succeeded her. Mrs. Price has held every office in the gift of the organization, and for several years did research work along the lines of immigration, of which committee she held the convenership. She is also deeply interested in Mental Hygiene, and at the time of writing (1934) is still provincial president of the U.F.W.A.

The varied interests of the United Farm Women have expressed themselves in the following committees: Health, Education, Beautification and Horticulture, Peace, Social Welfare, Co-operative Effort, Legislation, Home Economics, Young People's Work, Immigration and Political Economy, each of which has its Convener. Bulletins are sent out monthly from the Central Office furnishing interesting program material.

In that first year of our organization, we devised a crest and motto. The former consisted of an ancient lamp bearing its flame and surmounted with antlers - the emblem of strength and freedom. The motto was "Forward."

The United Farm Women's Organization has translated into reality the vision of its founders, and is recognized today not only as a lightbearer, but also as one of the very finest organizations of Canadian women.